

Samuel Nelson

Middleborough July 24 - 1834

To  
Dr. Stephen Shaw of Windsor

This I send you by the hand of  
Brother T. L. McCullom of Grafton  
that you may know I still remember you  
I wish you to read this book attentively  
attentively & if opportunity admit let me  
know how you like or dislike it

This from your old friend & brother

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*The eternal purpose of God, the  
foundation of effectual calling.*

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S E R M O N,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

First Baptist Society

IN BOSTON,

LORD'S-DAY MORNING,

February 19, 1804.

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3677  
By THOMAS BALDWIN, A. M.  
Pastor of the Second Baptist Church in said Town.

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*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep.—JESUS CHRIST.*

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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THE following Discourse was delivered wholly extempore, without the least thought of publication. At the particular request of many of my friends, to whom I owe a deference, it is now presented to the public. I have endeavoured, as far as my recollection would serve, to preserve the sentiments and ideas, and have not designedly omitted any thing. Nothing essential is added.

To the blessing of Almighty God I commit it, praying that he would make it a mean of establishing his people in the truth, so that they may not be carried about with every wind of doctrine.



A

## S E R M O N.

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ROMANS viii. 28.

*AND WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM THAT LOVE GOD, TO THEM WHO ARE THE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.*

IN this chapter, the apostle has presented before us the safety and happiness of all who are in Christ Jesus. The distinguishing characteristics of the believer, are drawn with a plainness not to be mistaken. From the manner in which the subject is introduced, we must consider it as an inference from what had been said in some of the preceding chapters. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit : for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." And not only the apostle, but all other believers, who walk after the Spirit. "For what

the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh ;” not that the law itself was weak, but those who were in the flesh, who were under the influence of depravity, were weak ; therefore, “ God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh ;” that is, Christ in our nature condemned sin, “ that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” Here the apostle introduces the great mystery of redemption ; and shows, that through the obedience and death of Christ, sinners can be saved consistently with righteousness, or with the strictest requirements of the divine law. The righteousness of the law is not dispensed with in the gospel method of salvation, but “ fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” You will here observe, it is not fulfilled by us, but in us. By virtue of our union with Christ, we become interested in his obedience ; and in this sense Christ is said to be the “ end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth.”

In further delineating this character, the apostle shows, that the real Christian is not under the influence of a fleshly, worldly temper, but has the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him : That he has received the spirit of adoption, by which he is enabled to call God his Father. By this gracious act of adoption, he is made “ an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ.” This high relation, however, does not exempt the Christian from trials, but only assures him, that if he suffers with Christ, or for his cause here, he will be glorified with him hereafter.

In order to support the people of God under the crosses and trials of this present life, and to show them the favourable issue of all their sufferings, it is added in our text, “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*”

What an extensive, precious promise is here! All things, however diversified and contrary in their nature, shall eventually work for good to the believer; to the soul that loves God. But as it is presumed that no person ever loved God in the sense of the text, until called by grace; and as they are called according to a divine purpose, we are therefore naturally led, in contemplating the subject, to begin with what the apostle places as the foundation of all our hopes, i. e. the immutable purpose of God.

From the subject thus placed before us, we shall attempt to show,

I. What is implied in being *called according to God's purpose.*

II. That all such, and such only as are thus called, do really love God.

III. We shall consider what is the import of the declaration in the text, *that all things work together for good to them who love God.*

It will be impossible to explain the apostle's meaning in the text, and to allow him to speak intelligibly, when he says, we are *called according to his purpose*, unless we allow that this purpose exist-

ed antecedent to our being called. We can as easily conceive of its having existed in the divine mind from eternity, as of its existing but a day or an hour before the event takes place. But it may be asked, Has God purposed any thing respecting those who are called by his grace antecedent to their believing? I answer, he most certainly has; and that their calling is not owing to any contingent or uncertain cause, but according to this divine purpose.

Will any person presume to say, that the divine purposes are formed from day to day, so as to correspond to the characters of men in a state of probation; and that the will of God is suspended in its determinations on some uncertain changes in the moral tempers of men? No, my brethren, we will not entertain a sentiment so dishonourable to the all-wise, omniscient Jehovah, as to suppose he governs his purposes by second causes. With the eternal God there is nothing new. He clearly saw the end from the beginning. The whole plan of man's salvation, in its utmost possible extent, was all adjusted in the divine mind from everlasting. It will hence appear that the purpose of God, according to which we are called, is an *eternal purpose*. What has now been asserted will receive full confirmation by consulting a few passages of scripture.\*

That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs with the Jewish Christians, and partakers of the promise in Christ by the gospel, was a mystery, which from

\* The reader is desired to examine with candour Eph. i. 4, 5. iii. 5, 6—9, 11. 2 Tim. i. 9. Rom. viii. ix. x. xi.

the beginning of the world had been hidden in God. Yet we are assured, that the calling of the Gentiles is not the effect of any change in their moral condition, but "according to the ETERNAL PURPOSE which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It may be asked, Does not this sentiment militate with the free agency of man, and with the general proclamation of the gospel? It is believed that it does not in the least. But even if it did, if God has declared in his word that he has formed an eternal purpose concerning the heirs of salvation, and that they are called conformably to it, I should hold myself bound to believe it, so long as I professed to draw my sentiments of religion from the Bible.

As this purpose, so far as it respects individuals, is a secret hid in the mind of God, it can have no effect in influencing any person to reject the gospel. Nor does it act as a motive on the will of those, who by grace are brought to embrace the truth. Neither the one who rejects, nor the other who embraces the great salvation is conscious of any influence inconsistent with free agency. The one under the influence of sovereign grace willingly receives the gospel; the other under the influence of depravity, as freely and heartily rejects it.

There are some who are unwilling to own that they wholly reject the sentiment under consideration, as there is so much of it found in the Bible, but attempt to explain it in a light less exceptionable to the feelings of depraved nature. They will tell you they hold to election. But if you ask

them how they hold it, you will be answered that we are elected when we believe, and not before. But how can it be said that we are *called according to his purpose*, if no purpose respecting our salvation existed until we believe? If our being chosen is an effect of our believing, or in consequence of it, then it will unavoidably follow, that God's choice is dependent on ours: for in believing, the soul actually chooses God for its portion and everlasting all. This sentiment makes our believing the cause of God's choosing us; while the sentiment I advocate, makes God's choice the cause of our believing. The former, while it sooths and flatters the pride of the sinner, deceives him, by leading him to believe that he can choose what his heart is totally opposed to; the latter, although it abases the creature in the dust, exalts the character of God, who by his sovereign grace saves the sinner; who would never do any thing, if let alone, to save himself.

Do we not, my brethren, in all cases where we elect persons to any office, or to fill any place of trust, act in a similar manner? Do we, when we choose a person to represent us in the Legislature of our Commonwealth, first put him into office, and then choose him? Or do we choose him in order to put him into office? Most certainly the latter. The very supposition that we get into Christ somehow or other, and by our own exertions become believers, and then God chooses us to eternal glory, is too absurd to be admitted.

If, to evade the force of the foregoing reasoning, it should be said, that sinners are not converted by

their own unassisted exertions, but by the influences of the Spirit of God, it will be admitted, but the difficulty is not obviated. For one of two things will necessarily follow; either that God operates in a greater degree upon them that believe, than upon others, or that they had some previous good dispositions, which the others did not possess. Let the opposers of the doctrine of sovereign grace choose which side of the dilemma they please.

Those who deny the eternal purpose of God, respecting his people, frequently argue from Peter's addressing his brethren, as "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." They here understand the apostle to assert their election to be at the time they are sanctified through the Spirit unto obedience; or in other words, at the time of their conversion. But they seem to overlook an important part of the passage, which declares their election to be *according to the foreknowledge of God*. But what has the foreknowledge of God to do with their election, in case this depends on their believing? Should it be said, that God foreknew they would believe; I ask, How did God foreknow this? Was it from his foreseeing any previous disposition in them to believe? or from his own eternal purpose to bring them to the knowledge of salvation in their effectual calling? Our text asserts the latter; that those who love God are "called according to his purpose."\*

\* The apostle Peter is, however, by some, made to support a very different sentiment. The passage referred to is

That the apostles were agreed in this important sentiment, and that I have given the true sense of the foregoing passage, will more fully appear, by comparing it with our context. Here Paul continues the argument with great force and plainness. "For," saith he, "whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son." To predestinate, is to *foreordain*; I know of no other fair meaning to the word. He has not, as the opposers of the sentiment argue, predestinated persons to live as they list, and die impenitent, and yet go to heaven; no, but *to be conformed to the image of his Son*. He has chosen them to be holy here, and happy forever. To place the matter it would seem beyond the possibility of a doubt, the apostle continues, "More-

<sup>2</sup> Pet. i. 10. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things ye shall never fall." Much stress has been laid upon the apostle's mentioning *calling* first, before *election*. But who were the persons addressed? The first verse will inform us. "To them who have obtained like precious faith with us." What, and got to do something yet to be elected! How long is it to be supposed a man may be a believer and not elected? Very probably the persons whom the apostle addressed had been possessed of this *precious faith*, some for months, and others for years. Be this as it may, one thing is certain, they are said to have precious faith, and are called in the text "*brethren*"; therefore they must have been both *called* and *elected* before this, according to the sentiments of those who suppose men to be elected when they believe: for none else are mentioned in the context but believers. Those who make so much account of the order in which these two words are placed by Peter, are desired to compare them with the following passage of Paul, 2 Tim. i. 9. "Who hath *saved* us, and *called* us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

over, whom he did predestinate, them he also called ; and whom he called, them he also justified ; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

We may here join with the apostle and ask, "What shall we say to these things ? If God be for us, who can be against us?"\*\* Here, my brethren, you see a complete chain ; and "the scriptures cannot be broken," without "putting asunder what God hath joined together."

We have now compared the sentiments of two apostles, and find them to agree, that the calling of his people is according to the foreknowledge and eternal purpose of God. Let us now inquire for a moment, whether John has said any thing which corresponds with our subject, or whether he has left his testimony against it. He has said some things about our loving God, and of God's loving us. How does he state it ? Does he say, *he loves us because we first loved him ?* (This indeed would look like the notion of our being elected because we believe.) But does it appear to you, my brethren, to give that glory to God which is due to him, in every view of our salvation ? No, certainly ; let us then read it right, and cherish the important idea. *We love him because he first loved us.* God's love to us, is antecedent to our love to him ; yea, it is placed by John in this passage, and by other inspired writers, as the efficient cause of our love to him. God, speaking by the prophet Jeremiah, of Israel, said, "I have loved thee with an *everlasting love*, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." You will observe it is not here said, al-

\* Rom. viii. 29—31.

though it is true, I *will* love thee, but “I *have* loved thee with an everlasting love.”

It may appear unnecessary to add any further proof, but it would seem improper not to notice what our Lord has said on this interesting subject. A little before the death of Jesus, when he had concluded his valedictory address to his disciples, he “lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come : glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee ; As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to *as many as thou hast given him.*”\* Christ’s universal dominion is here asserted, and a plain reason assigned for it, i. e. “that he should give eternal life to as many as his Father had given him.” If every individual of the human race is given to Christ in the sense of this text, it will conclude strongly in favour of the salvation of all the human race ; but if this limiting clause, *as many as thou hast given him*, means only such as believe ; then it establishes the sentiment under consideration, that all that ever have, and all that ever will believe, were given to Christ in the covenant of redemption before the world began. This text, if it has any meaning, and I believe you will allow that it has, must mean that Christ has many given him to whom he has not yet given eternal life. For it follows, “and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” Very many, we would humbly hope, whom the Father hath given to Christ, have not yet been called by grace ; perhaps millions that are yet to be born.

\* John xvii. 1, 2.

This perfectly agrees with what Christ had said, when representing himself under the character of the good shepherd ;\* “ And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold ; them also *I must bring*, and they *shall bear my voice*, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” The visible flock of Christ at this time, had been collected from among the Jews. The gospel had not as yet been preached to the Gentiles ; but Christ had sheep among them, which he said he *must bring*. And though hitherto they had remained deaf to the voice of mercy, yet, said he, *they shall bear my voice*. “ Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” This perfectly harmonizes with the apostle, that he hath “ predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son.”

Indulge me, my hearers, to add one remark more under this head. Our Lord, no doubt with a view to impress this sentiment more deeply upon the minds of his disciples, said to them, “ *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.*”† That is, ye did not first choose me, as the cause of my choosing you. *Simon Peter*, and *Andrew* his brother were not seeking Jesus when he found them, but mending their nets. *Matthew* was sitting at the receipt of custom when Jesus called him, and for aught that appears, wholly bent upon his money concerns. Where was Paul when Jesus found him ? Was he seeking him, or persecuting him ? Certainly the latter. Was it not the case with many of us, that at the moment when our attention was first arrested, we were thoughtless and secure, and felt not the least motion of heart

\* John x. 16.

† John xv. 16.

towards the blessed Jesus ? Shall we not hence conclude with the apostle, that "we love him because he first loved us." And that the gracious calls of his Spirit, by which he brings us to repentance, are according to his eternal purpose.

Here, my brethren, is a foundation which looks permanent : The fixed, eternal purposes of the great Jehovah. These cannot be shaken by all the opposition of carnal reason. They still remain as immovable as mountains of brass. What foundation besides this have we to build a hope upon, that ever another sinner will be converted ? Can it be on any thing in the heart of depraved man ? Certainly it cannot. Both reason and scripture forbid such a conclusion. If we cherish at all the pleasing hope, of the future enlargement of Christ's kingdom, it must rest entirely on this consideration, that God has said, "*I will work*, and who shall let it ?" But does God carry on this work of his Spirit in the hearts of men without any previous design ? without any plan ? changing and accommodating his purposes so as to meet the exigency of things ? Can any thing take place to produce such a change which was not known before ? and could any thing be foreknown, even to God himself, which was not previously certain ? To answer these questions, we need only to attend to the voice of truth, which saith, "*I am God, and there is none like me* ; declaring the *end* from the *beginning*, and from ancient times the things that *are not yet done*, saying, *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.*"\*

\* Isaiah xlvi. 9, 10.

What majesty and glory shine in such language as this ! How calculated to raise adoring sentiments in the mind of the humble Christian ! On this high ground faith takes her stand, and casts her eye over the wide range of distant ages, and sees the accomplishment of all that God has promised. Without this, there can be no certainty that either the predictions or promises will ever be fulfilled. It is difficult to conceive how any future event could be predicted, unless the *divine purpose* stood security for its accomplishment. In short, give up this, and all will be plunged in uncertainty. All must then depend on the volitions of depraved man, which are ever changing. But, blessed be God, this is not the case. All is safe in the hands of our exalted Redeemer, through "whom we have obtained an inheritance, being *predestinated according to the purpose of HIM*, who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will."\*

Thus, brethren, you see that your calling springs from the everlasting love of God, and rests wholly upon his immutable purpose. In whatever way this change has been effected, or whatever means have been employed, you will be constrained to acknowledge that it is all of grace. Whether your minds have been gradually impressed with a sense of your lost condition, or whether you have been suddenly arrested and turned about ; if in either case you have been brought to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, you may rest assured that you have been *called according to his purpose.*

From the unusually solemn attention which I have observed while discussing this important subject, I cannot but hope the arguments have made a due impression on your minds ; and that every believer will see, that his safety rests not upon any thing in himself, but upon the eternal, unchangeable purpose of God. Who, my brethren, that contemplates this amazing plan of grace, can forbear exclaiming with the apostle, O the height, the depth, the length and breadth of the love of God ! It is high as heaven ; it reaches to earth ; it began in eternity ; it extends to eternity ! But I proceed,

II. To show, that all who are thus called do really love God.

There are many Christians who often doubt whether they have been savingly called, and consequently doubt whether they ever loved God aright. With a view to determine this point satisfactorily, we will briefly explain what is meant by loving God, and then produce some of the evidences which prove the existence of such a temper.

To love God in the sense of our text, is to feel and exercise a temper of heart, corresponding in some good degree to the requirements of the divine law. That law which requires us to love God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, is a transcript or exhibition of the moral perfections of God. It is the same under every dispensation. It claims our obedience from the immediate relation we stand in to him as our Lord and Lawgiver. Our obligations are founded in the

nature and fitness of things, and can never cease, so long as God continues worthy of esteem, and we have capacities to love an amiable object.

This heavenly temper can never exist in any proper degree, but where the undivided affections of the heart are supremely placed on God. No rival can be admitted. And however strong our affections may appear for some endeared created object, they will all be subordinated to this, when the heart is rightly exercised.

Do any of you, my Christian friends, begin to suspect yourselves, whether you are the subjects of this holy temper? We will now place before you some of the evidences by which you may try yourselves.

1. This love embraces with delightful complacency the whole of the *Divine Character*. This distinguishes it from a false or spurious affection, which generally fixes on some single attribute, such as mercy, or goodness; but is wholly unreconciled to justice and holiness. True love rejoices in God because he is God; because he is just such a being as he is. His law and government appear perfectly right. The pious heart often expresses the language of David, "O how love I thy law." The innumerable objects which surround the believer, each bearing some mark of the Divinity, serve as so many conductors to lead his thoughts up to God. His soul sweetly rests in the divine favour, and exclaims with holy ardour, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee."

This heavenly temper is not less visible in adversity than in prosperity. Sometimes God is pleased to hide his face from his own dear children, probably to bring them to repentance for some forgotten sin, or to try the strength of their love. You may now find them "cast down, but not destroyed." They go mourning from day to day as without the sun ; and are often saying to themselves, "O that I knew where I might find him." Still seeking, and still disconsolate, they ask the watchmen, "When saw ye him whom my soul loveth." I mourn an absent God, and nothing can satisfy my soul but the returns of his love.

2. Another mark, or evidence of our love to God, is, an unfeigned love to those who bear his image. "We know," says the apostle John, "that we have passed from death to life, because we *love the brethren.*" But is this a certain criterion? Are there none that love Christians but those who have been born from above? There are none who love them with a right affection, but such as have the love of God in their hearts. It is a distinguishing trait in this love, that it attaches to the divine image, and to nothing else. It forms a union, or oneness of soul, which cannot be formed upon any other principle. "He that is joined to the Lord is *one spirit.*" If we love God whom we have not seen, we shall certainly love our brother whom we have seen.

It is not to be doubted, that many serious reflecting persons, who have never experienced a saving change, feel a regard and veneration for Christians, which they do not for vicious persons;

but this differs, after all, from Christian love. Can it be supposed that any but a parent ever knew that peculiar distinguishing love which parents feel to their tender offspring? It is a fact that they do not. Many have thought they did, but when they came to be parents they knew to the contrary. So others, before their conversion, have thought they loved the children of God as Christians love one another; but when they came to experience a change of heart, they have found an affection to the disciples of Christ, totally different from what they ever felt before.

3. A further evidence of our *love to God*, and of our being *called according to his purpose*, is manifested by a cheerful obedience to his commands. Where the divine law is impressed upon the heart, it is a sure pledge of interest in the new covenant, and never fails of producing obedience to the whole revealed will of God. Our Lord lays this down as a test of our friendship to him. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Again, he states it more positively, "If a man love me, *he will keep my words.*" Not all the fears of hell, nor dread of future punishment, ever produced a single act of acceptable obedience. The real Christian is not driven to duty by a slavish fear, but drawn by the constraining influence of divine love. Animated by this noble sentiment, duty becomes a pleasure, and the *Cross* of Christ his chief glory. The most difficult and self-denying precepts are not grievous, but joyous. He delights to do the will of God, because it is his will. He ardently desires that happy period, when he will be entirely con-

formed in heart and temper to the holy will of God. I add,

4. This holy affection is also manifested by a sincere delight in the worship and ordinances of God.

The public worship of God seems designed, not only to impress the mind with a solemn reverence for the Supreme Majesty, but to furnish the soul with an occasion of delightful intercourse with God. Hence these seasons have been highly prized by good men in every age. Who can fully conceive of the pious joy which animated the chosen tribes, when repairing to the hill of Zion ! They preferred the holy solemnities of the temple above their chief joy. With what inimitable beauty does David express the feelings of his heart, when lamenting his absence from the house of God ! “ How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts ! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord : My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” “ As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. When shall I come and appear before God ? These, my brethren, are the sentiments and feelings of all *who love God, who have been called according to his purpose.*

We seldom, if ever, enjoy more of God, than when waiting upon him in ways of his appointment. When he is graciously pleased to favour us with his divine presence in his ordinances, our joys rise “ unmeasurably high, and heaven begins below.”

You are not, my Christian friends, strangers to these devout pleasures. What precious seasons have you enjoyed within these walls ! How often have your souls been animated with the glories of Christ displayed in his gospel, so as to lose sight of every thing but God ! And although like Anna, you could not abide in the temple day and night, yet you have carried a sweet favour of religion with you into the business and concerns of the week. I trust that many of you could appeal to-day to the great Searcher of hearts, who knows the sincerity of your affection, that you often most ardently long for the return of these precious seasons. You place them among your happiest moments ; and look forward with joyful anticipation to that day, when you will join your kindred spirits above, to worship God in the beauty of holiness. But I must not enlarge.

I am far from thinking that I have described all the exercises of the soul by which the love of God manifests itself ; but these must suffice for the present.

III. We proceed to consider the unlimited declaration in the text, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

I have scarce time to glance at this part of the subject, but would briefly observe, that if there were not another promise in all the book of God, this, if fully realized, would be sufficient to support the believer under all his trials. *All things work together for good.* It is not said that "all things," separately considered, or of their own na-

ture and tendency, work for the good of the believer; but, (let the idea never be forgotten) it is under the controlling agency of our covenant God, that all things are made subservient to our good.

Some things are in their nature so opposite to the happiness of the believer, that if permitted to take their own course, they would work his eternal ruin. Such is the nature and tendency of all sin and unbelief; and such would be their final issue, if not controlled by the gracious interpositions of Heaven. Hence the opposition of the enemies of religion is not to be estimated by the injury produced, but by what was intended. Could we believe the language of the text, would it not serve to calm our minds under the crosses and trials of life? But so slow are we to learn, that, after having experienced in innumerable instances the truth of this promise, yet, when beset with new trials, we cry out with Jacob of old, "All these things are against me." God sometimes arrays himself with terrors, and effects the purposes of his love in such mysterious ways, that his own children are filled with amazement.\*

We are usually called to encounter trials and difficulties without being permitted to see their

\* This was the case when David attempted to bring the ark from Gibeah to Jerusalem. His carrying it upon a *new* cart was contrary to God's positive command. The breach that was made upon Uzzah, was a very trying, dark dispensation; yet it was overruled, no doubt, for good, to teach David and all others the importance of adhering to positive institutions as they are delivered to us. The same may be said of the death of Ananias and Sapphira.—But what a merciful check was given by this event to all hypocritical pretenders to religion!

final issue. It is in this way only that our faith and love can be properly tried. Had Abraham known beforehand what God intended in calling him to offer up his son, we should never have discerned any great degree of heroism in his faith. He might indeed have shown considerable zeal in repairing to *Mount Moriah*, and with great parade have erected his altar and laid the wood in order ; but had he known, after all, that he had only to offer up *a ram caught in a thicket* instead of his son, it could not have been considered as a very high expression of love to God. But taking the account as it is, and it exhibits one of the severest trials, and at the same time one of the noblest instances of unwavering faith, of magnanimous, undissembled love recorded in the history of man. Abraham, by this transaction, proved his love to God ; and by the issue, God proved, that *all things work together for good to them that love him.*

The promise in our text is designed to be of common use to all believers. It comes to their relief upon every occasion. It travels with the Christian through the whole journey of life, and rests with him at every stage. Whatever may be the allotments of Providence respecting him, whether riches or poverty, prosperity or adversity, all shall work together for his good. The temptations of Satan, the opposition of wicked men, and even the struggles of the *old man within*, shall all be overruled for his good. Should one trial follow another in swift succession, like Job's messengers ; should the dark clouds of adversity collect with sevenfold blackness ; the believer may calm his mind with

this consideration, that all shall work for his good in the end, however painful the operation. O how privileged is the good man ! Who would not, like Moses, "choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," (if this is to be the end of their sufferings) "than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season?" Surely nothing can harm us, if we be followers of that which is good. We shall ere long come off conquerors, and more than conquerors, through Him who hath loved and given himself for us. Then shall we see, with greater clearness than ever, God's gracious designs in permitting the sorrows and afflictions which befall us in the present life, and shall be fully satisfied that all have contributed to promote our greatest happiness. They that come out of *great tribulation*, will be finally presented *before the throne* in robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. But I must draw to a close.

1. From the subject thus opened and explained, we see most clearly the safety and happiness of the people of God. They are safe, because that, conformably to an eternal purpose, they are in Christ Jesus, and consequently freed from condemnation.

This is evident, from their *effectual calling*, from their *love to God*, and from their *walking after the Spirit*, and not after the flesh. They are happy in what they now enjoy, and from their interest in the promise in the text, that all things shall work for their good. What a firm foundation, my brethren, does our subject present, for our hopes to rest upon. The immutable, eternal purpose of God ; his unchanging love and faithfulness, accompanied with the most gracious declarations and

promises ! Will not a consideration of these things serve as a constant stimulus to duty ? Will they not bind us in everlasting obligations of gratitude ? " While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Yet he had died in vain, had we been left to ourselves. We should have still continued in our sins, and remained enemies to the gospel, had it not been attended with " the power of God. Who hath *saved us, and called us* with an holy calling ; not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.\*

In this deep laid plan, what amazing riches of grace do we behold ! " God's kindest thoughts are here express'd." Boundless love and mercy have burst forth upon the children of men, to the astonishment of angels ! And have you, my brethren, been made the happy participants of this grace, while many around you still refuse it ? Let me exhort you, to live to him who died for you. Let your daily conduct and conversation witness that you have been with Jesus. If you have a saving interest in Christ, you will not *walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* Your trials may be many and severe ; they will probably be short ; and while they continue, they are all at work (whether you perceive it or not) for your greatest good. When you shall be finally prepared for your inheritance among them who are sanctified, Christ will receive you to that " kingdom which was prepared for you from the foundation of the world." " And so shall you be ever with the Lord."

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• 2 Tim. i. 9.

2. Our subject suggests the only solid ground of hope to the anxious sinner. Has he not long been trying every effort, which an unrenewed heart can make? And what relief has he gained? None at all. Nor can he expect any from this quarter. In *vain is salvation hoped for from the hills*, or from any thing else, but the infinite mercy of God. Can you place any dependence upon yourselves, that you will ever be any better until renewed by grace? If you have any acquaintance with your own hearts, surely you cannot. But you may ask, Can there be any hope for a wretch so vile as I am? for one who has sinned so long against light and love, and all the tenders of mercy? Hear the gracious answer of God himself! "Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." From the very circumstance of your being awakened, you have reason to hope God has designs of mercy for you. Jesus hath said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."\* Are you really burthened with sin? Can you adopt the language of one of old, "I mourn as a dove; mine eyes fail with looking upward; O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me?"† Then hear the inviting voice of Jesus; "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." O that you may know the sovereign, distinguishing love of Christ, in your *effectual calling*; that you may be enabled to give your hearts unreservedly to him, and enjoy all that peace and consolation which results from believing, I add once more—*Hear*.

\* John vi. 37.

† Isaiah xxxviii. 14.

3. That there is no other foundation on which sinners of any description can build a hope of salvation, but that which is laid in the *eternal purpose of God.* Many have said, If this doctrine be true, it is very discouraging. But it may be asked, What is there to encourage them if this doctrine be not true? Is there any thing in depravity which would ever lead a sinner to God? If so, we have mistook its nature. The sinner, whose heart is today in opposition to the gospel, will remain the same to-morrow, unless changed by sovereign grace. It would be the most cruel of all deceptions, to flatter him, that if left wholly to himself, unembarrassed by a divine purpose, he would do well enough. Though opposed at present, yet at some future period he would undoubtedly be willing to forsake his sins and turn to the Lord. This is a very plausible error; but it is the very height of delusion and falsehood. As well might you expect a stream, that had been descending for ages, to turn about of its own accord, and ascend to its source,

Do any of you, my dear hearers, begin to make the ancient, though too common objection; If all is dependent on God, "Why doth he yet find fault? Who hath resisted his will?" Nothing which I can do can alter the divine purpose? To this I reply; You may rest assured, that God has never purposed to save any in impenitency and unbelief; nor to damn any, who repent and believe the gospel. Are you not commanded to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;"\*—to "strive to enter in at the strait gate;"†—to

"labour for the meat which endureth to everlasting life ;"\*\*—to "repent and believe the gospel."† If these are commanded duties, under the gospel dispensation, and you live and die in the neglect of them, be assured you will not be condemned for what God has done, or not done, but because you have violated the holy law of God, and neglected and despised the great salvation. O that you might feel your own impotency to every thing that is good, arising entirely from your opposition of heart to God ; that the Spirit of the living God might awaken in you a deep and affecting sense of your need of salvation ; and that you may be enabled to "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near."\*

You will not think that we, who preach the gospel to you, feel indifferent towards you, or unconcerned about your eternal well-being. Far from this, with all the tender solicitude which your situation, and our own accountability can inspire, we endeavour to set before you the whole counsel of God ; and cease not to "pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this calling*, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power."‡ To the infinite compassion of that God, who is "able to subdue all things to himself ;" and who in all the gracious operations of his Spirit does all things "according to the counsel of his own will," we commend you, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. AMEN.

\* John vi. 27. † Mark i. 15. Acts xvii. 30. ‡ John iii. 23.  
‡ 2 Thes. i. 11.

F I N I S.

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